

Barnabas, son of encouragement

"Peter," James said, "that man I told you about was here again tonight."

"We had a good meeting," Peter answered, ignoring James' comment. "Many came forward to be baptized."

"I wonder why he always stands in the back," James said, persisting in his questioning. "I bet he is a spy sent by the Jewish elders. Soon we will all be arrested."

"James," Peter replied, "where is your faith? We must do what we have to do, and we will go on preaching in spite of those who try to silence us."

"You're right, Peter. It's just that I feel so responsible for all of our Church members. If we are arrested, they might lose heart," James said.

"Perhaps what you really mean, James, is that you might lose heart," Peter said looking directly at him. "Be strong, James. You're a good disciple, and there is much work to be done."

James stayed long after Peter had gone. He wanted so much to be a good disciple, but sometimes he was afraid. The Jewish leaders really believed the disciples had broken the law by following Jesus. But Jesus was his whole life, and James knew that he would go on preaching even if it meant he would have to die.

James was deep in these thoughts and didn't look up as the stranger approached. It wasn't until the man stood right next to him that James realized it was the same person who had been in the back of the meeting room for several nights.

The man's face was kind and his eyes were not those of an enemy. James was not afraid anymore, and he spoke to the stranger. "What do you wish?" he asked calmly.

"My name is Joseph. I have heard about Jesus and His teachings for a long time," the man began. "I believe that He truly is

the Christ, the Messiah promised long ago."

"We welcome you to our Church then," James answered simply.

"I have brought something for you," Joseph said. "It's not much, but it's everything I have." He opened the satchel he was carrying and revealed his offering.

"I owned a small field, but I sold it and I want you to use this money to help your Church in its work," Joseph said humbly.

James was stunned for a moment. This man had given all that he owned to the Church without even being asked. Where would he go now? "Stay with us," James said. "We would be honored to have a worker like you for our cause."

The next day, Joseph joined the other apostles. They greeted him warmly. Peter nicknamed him "Barnabas," because the name means "son of encouragement." Barnabas helped the apostles in all of their work with the poor. He preached boldly about Jesus.

One day, Barnabas came to the apostles and said, "I have news from our fellow Church in Damascus. There is much to rejoice about. After a period of strife, the Church grows stronger every day," he said, smiling.

"And that will be the story of our Church everywhere," James added. "The persecution only serves to increase our numbers."

"There has been a miracle," Barnabas continued.

"It doesn't surprise me," Peter answered. "Jesus said that through Him, we would perform even greater miracles than He had done."

"One of our former enemies is now a supporter," Barnabas said slowly. "I have invited him to meet with us here today."

"And who might this new friend be?" Peter asked.

Cindy Cottone

The Bible Corner



"Saul of Tarsus, now called Paul," Barnabas replied.

The apostles reacted loudly in their disapproval. "Barnabas, you can't be serious," Peter said. "This Saul was the leader of the forces against us in Jerusalem."

"And it was Saul who stood in approval and watched the stoning of Stephen," someone else added. "Are we supposed to just forget all of that?"

"I think that Saul is a spy sent by the chief priests and he only pretends now to be one of us," James said.

"My dear friend, James," Barnabas said chuckling, "you thought that I was a spy, too."

No one said anything further until Barnabas continued. "Have all of you forgotten what Jesus said about forgiveness? Jesus taught us that 'even if someone wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns and asks for forgiveness, you must forgive him.' I'm not denying that Paul persecuted the believers. But now he preaches about Jesus. He was nearly killed by the Jewish leaders in Damascus. Just let him come here today and tell his story."

"You're right, Barnabas," Peter answered. "Tell Paul to come, and we can see for ourselves."

When Paul arrived, he was greeted half-heartedly by everyone except Barnabas. Paul ignored their cool reception and stood before the group. "I don't blame you for what you must be thinking about me," he said. "Thank you for allowing me to speak to you today. Yes, I was responsible for the arrest and trial of many of the followers. I was so single-minded in my search that I intended to go

to Damascus and bring back those who had fled there from Jerusalem."

Paul paused for a moment and looked around the room. The faces were firmly set against him. Barnabas smiled in encouragement and motioned for him to continue.

"As I approached the city of Damascus, a light that was so bright shone on me from above, and I was blinded. And a voice said, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?'"

"Who is speaking to me?" I said. "Who am I persecuting?"

"I am Jesus," the voice answered, "the One you are persecuting."

"After that, I had to be led into the city and there I waited for three days. A fellow believer, Ananias, came and laid hands on me, and I was cured of my blindness. I am here today to tell you how sorry I am for the wrongs I committed against the Church. I intend to spend the rest of my life making up for it. I will travel everywhere and tell people about Jesus. I will die if I must in the process, but I will go."

When Paul finished giving his testimony, many of the people in the room were crying because they realized that Paul had truly been converted. Peter stood up and said: "Brother Paul, we welcome you to our Church in Jerusalem." Everyone else stood up and applauded in agreement with the decision.

This was the beginning of a long friendship between Paul and Barnabas. Together they traveled to many nations to spread the good news about Jesus, and they attracted many new followers. The Church throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria enjoyed a period of peace.

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